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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2228
INFO RUCNCLC/CHILD LABOR COLLECTIVE
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0037
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7617
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1327
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8766
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1545
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9416
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0255
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1068
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0081
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

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SUBJECT: BEPZA PLANS FOR WORKER ASSOCIATION ELECTIONS

1. (SBU) Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) Deputy Secretary Morshed Alam discussed with laboff BEPZA's plans to prepare for Workers Association (WA) elections. Alam confirmed BEPZA will announce its plans to factory managers, and BEPZA counselors and administrators before the end of October. The counselors, in turn, would provide instruction to workers on the process for petitioning BEPZA's Executive Chairman for the formation of a Workers Association. He outlined BEPZA's procedures to ensure transparency in the petition process, as well as in the ensuing referendum.

2. (SBU) The Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Workers Association and Industrial Relations Act, 2004 (the EPZ Law) brought Bangladesh into compliance with ILO's Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. After an interim period where workers in the EPZ elected Worker Representation and Welfare Committees (WRWC), effective November 1, 2006, workers will be able to petition BEPZA to form Workers Associations, to represent workers and bargain collectively on their behalf, and to elect officers. The EPZ law also requires the GOB to establish labor tribunals.

3. (SBU) Alam was concerned about the law's tight time frames, giving as an example the five day requirement to hold a referendum upon receipt of petitions from 30 percent of workers who demand the formation of a WA. He said that if all factories' workers demand a referendum at once, it would not be possible to hold all referenda within the mandated timeframe. Citing the Chittagong EPZ as an example, he said that BEPZA only has a staff of 28 counselors and there are 121 factories. "It is not possible to hold a great number of elections at the same time given our level of staff."

4. (SBU) Alam said that on October 12, BEPZA sent a letter to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) asking for the appointment of two Labor Tribunal Judges and one Labor Appellate Judge. He was optimistic about these appointments, saying that the PM's Governing Board has already approved the appointments and expects everything to be finalized before the current government leaves power at the end of the month.

5. (SBU) Asked if he anticipated any complications, Alam noted the enormity of the task at hand, adding that this is the first time BEPZA will be accepting petitions, holding referenda, forming Worker Association (WA) constitution

drafting committees, registering Worker Associations, and holding WA Executive Council elections. "We have never done so much before," he said.

16. (SBU) In response to Alam's concerns, laboff suggested that Solidarity Center is in an excellent position to provide technical assistance that might facilitate the process. Alam said he would pass the offer on to recently appointed BEPZA Executive Chairman Yussuf.
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